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RUEHWH/WHADP COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHSW/AMEMBASSY BERN PRIORITY 0038
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 000048

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [CU](#)
SUBJECT: UPROAR AMONG CUBAN INTELLECTUALS

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Classified By: COM Michael E. Parmly for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: The recent reappearance on Cuban state television of three former officials responsible for cultural pogroms in the 1960s and 1970s has set off a firestorm of reaction among prominent Cuban intellectuals. In an email exchange addressed to a &who,s who8 of Cuban literary figures and artists, several intellectuals, led by prizewinning writers Anton Arrufat and Reylando Gonzalez, decried an apparent attempt to rehabilitate these hatchet men, and openly questioned the motives for doing so at this sensitive time. The reappearance of the three officials, who had been allies of Raul Castro, coupled with the recent resignation of the President of the official Union of Artists and Writers of Cuba (UNEAC) has caused concern. A group of 20 writers met with Culture Minister Abel Prieto and with the state broadcasting agency to protest the officials, television appearances, but we are told by one source that the exchange of emails has spread to some 40 intellectuals. The fact that Cuban intellectuals, including many establishment figures, have voiced such strong criticism and have aimed it so directly at the top of the regime is a further sign of disquiet among the nomenklatura. End Summary.

2.(C) The appearance of Luis Pavon Tamayo, the former chairman of the National Culture Council on a January 7 television program featuring important cultural figures in Cuban history, prompted an uproar among the Cuban intelligentsia. During his tenure on the National Cultural Council from 1971-1976, known as the &grey period,8 Pavon ruled with an iron fist, enforcing party discipline in a pogrom against Cuban writers and artists, and weeded out homosexuals. The appearance of Pavon, pictured in photos with Fidel and Raul Castro and extolling his closeness with Che Guevara, was the third in a series of appearances by former cultural officials. Pavon,s deputy Armando Quesada, called the "Torquesada8 or Inquisitor for his role in repressing Cuban theater, first appeared on a television program in November, followed in December by Jose Serguera, a former prosecutor who had overseen trials of "counter-revolutionaries8 in the early 1960s and was later head of the Cuban Institute of Radio Broadcasting. The resignation last month of the President of the Union of Writers and Artists (UNEAC), allegedly for personal reasons, and speculation about his possible replacement by more hard-line candidates for that position has added to the unrest.

13. (C) Immediately following the Pavon broadcast, a group of prominent Cuban writers led by Anton Arrufat and Reynaldo Gonzalez, a former USINT contact, began an email campaign decrying, as writer Norge Espinosa Mendez characterized it, &the resurrection of these cadavers.8 The emails recalled the persecution of writers and artists, who were neither &revolutionary nor counterrevolutionary8 under Pavon, and criticized the passivity of intellectuals, drawing parallels to today. Author Gerardo Fullera Leon reflected, &It is not a moment for fear or silence but of unity to thwart any attempt to return to that time and repeat history.8 Several intellectuals questioned the timing of the appearances by Pavon and his cohorts at a &watchful moment,8 according to Espinoza, &when questions about the immediate future must be posed with respect of the other, respect for all.8 The emails also reflected on Cuba,s post-Castro future, as Arturo Arango wrote, &We are living a moment as difficult as it is intense and I am convinced the direction the country takes in the more or less immediate future is the responsibility of all.8

4.(C) We understand that approximately 40 intellectuals participated in the email exchange. Another 200 writers and artists are listed as recipients and many of our contacts in the cultural community were well aware of the controversy. Some of the leaders of this campaign, such as Arrufat and Gonzalez, had been censored for their views or persecuted as homosexuals during the "grey period8 in the early 1970s, but have since become establishment figures among the Cuban intelligentsia. Most of the participants cannot be characterized as dissidents but range from independent writers and artists, including some USINT contacts, to well-connected literary figures close to the regime. A group of 20 intellectuals met last week with Cuban Culture Minister Abel Prieto, who offered no apology for the reappearance of Pavon, as well as with the Cuban Radio and Television

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Broadcasting Institute (ICRT). For its part, ICRT claimed to have been ignorant of Pavon,s past prior to airing the program. Several of the intellectuals also made critical comments to the international press about the repression they endured under Pavon. One dissident writer, Raul Antonio Capote, warned it was no coincidence orthodox hard-liners were resurfacing at a time when the regime faced an uncertain future.

15. (C) Comment: Although intellectuals and artists are a privileged class that has flourished under the regime and their reaction has a clear strain of self-interest, the furor over the Pavon episode illustrates emerging fissures among the nomenklatura. The fact that a group of more or less establishment figures launched such a public protest and demanded a voice in the future direction of post-Castro Cuba is significant. Until now, most dissent among intellectuals has been expressed through their individual works, as the painter Montoto (who was not on the email exchange) once commented to us, &All of our art is metaphor.8 For a group of intellectuals to collectively voice dissent in such a "public" forum as the Internet, and in the midst of a transition indicates that the nomenklatura will not be complacent as Raul Castro attempts to consolidate his illegitimate grip on power. It is worth recalling that many of the leaders of political transitions in Eastern Europe were artists and intellectuals, and it is worth continuing to cultivate our ties with these groups. While the regime may marginalize and repress traditional civil society actors and self-declared political dissidents, dissent among the nomenklatura, whom the regime relies on for political legitimacy, is more difficult to stifle. The sharp reaction of these intellectuals to events that happened almost 40 years ago also provides us with a possible window into post-Castro Cuba when less privileged Cubans will at last feel free to unleash their true emotions about the past half century.

